

Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (FY05-5013)

The health problem or issue

Healthcare providers who work long hours caring for young, severely wounded Soldiers are at risk for “compassion fatigue” from working long hours. A recent Pentagon survey found that 32% of troops reported feeling “a lot” of work-related stress, that cigarette smoking and heavy drinking are increasing, and that illnesses and accidents are twice as common among high-stressed troops.

Outcome

Outcomes are pending completed project implementation.

Impact on force readiness and deployability

The basis of the program is “mindfulness.” A mindful practitioner uses reflection and self-awareness, listens more attentively, becomes more flexible, uses better judgment, better understands the patient, and acts with greater compassion to relieve suffering. Shapiro (1998) found that participation in a course like this increased medical students’ empathy and spiritual experience, while reducing anxiety and psychological distress. This program can improve the health and well-being of course participants, increase their stress hardiness and resilience, and improve the quality of their therapeutic relationships with patients. These factors should also have a positive impact on morale and retention.

Demonstration of program effectiveness and/or impact

The materials in this program have a 23-year history of documented effectiveness (reduced medical and psychological symptoms in patients with pain, anxiety, depression, cancer, and chronic illnesses). Among healthcare providers, recent randomized controlled trials also found improved therapeutic relationships with patients.

Unique and/or innovative program aspects

Participants learn to respond more effectively to life’s unavoidable stresses in a program that focuses on developing internal resiliency resources. The practice of mindfulness also promotes spiritual health and well-being. This initiative will be implemented at an Army Medical Center and for Reserve Soldiers, as well.

Challenges to effective program implementation

Approval from the installation IRB took much longer than anticipated.

Contribution to the HPPI portfolio

Spiritual health and stress management resources

Project implementation update

Project start-up has been delayed. This project will carry over into FY06.